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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000004

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [KNNP](#) [BA](#) [IR](#) [OFFICIALS](#) [REGION](#)

SUBJECT: GCC SUMMIT: BAHRAIN FOCUSES ON IRAN

C O R R E C T E D COPY - PARA. 1 - "INTERNAL" TO "EXTERNAL"

REF: CAIRO 9470

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Bahrain Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid told the Ambassador that GCC FM Rashid Abdullah's post-GCC Summit comments about Iran's nuclear program reflected GCC concerns more than the watered-down language in the Summit's final statement. GCC members were not happy with Amre Moussa's June letter criticizing GCC focus on a Gulf nuclear free zone, but also -- especially Saudi Arabia -- did not want to raise tensions with Iran too much at this time. Still, Shaikh Khalid added, Iran as usual was not happy with the GCC Summit statement. He also went on at length about Bahrain's concerns regarding Iran. On other GCC Summit issues, he indicated that the leaders took a step back on the joint Peninsula Shield force, agreeing that countries would not deploy jointly except for exercises or in a crisis. On trade, they continued to grapple on how to deal with bilateral FTAs with countries other than the U.S., and postponed until 2007 the transition period to unify external GCC tariffs. End summary.

12. (C) In a December 28 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa discussed the December 18-19 GCC Summit, focusing much of his commentary on Iran. He said that, while the GCC members "did not want to create a ruckus about the nuclear issue," UAE Foreign Minister Rashid Abdullah's comments in a post-Summit press conference, which hit more strongly on the nuclear issue than the Summit statement, reflected the sentiment during the Summit discussion. "We are worried," he stated. "We don't want to see nuclear weapons in the region."

13. (C) Asked about Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa's June letter to the GCC questioning the GCC's support for a nuclear free zone in the Gulf (aimed at Iran, as opposed to the broader Middle East concern about Israel) (reftel), Shaikh Khalid said that the GCC countries were not happy with the letter, and did not want to issue a Summit statement that did not in some way touch on their concerns about Iran's nuclear program. In the end, they developed compromise language for the final statement which did not directly mention Iran but called for the "international community to make the Middle East, including the Gulf region, a zone free of weapons of mass destruction." The GCC leaders also reaffirmed their opposition to Iran's occupation of the three UAE islands. "As happens after every GCC Summit," Shaikh Khalid stated, "the Iranians were not very happy with us."

14. (C) On the internal dynamics at the Summit on the Iran issue, Shaikh Khalid said that Bahrain and the UAE were "really worried," while Oman and Kuwait were ambivalent about taking a strong position against Iran, and Qatar was on the fence. Saudi Arabia, while sharing Bahrain's strong feelings about Iran, wanted to play down the Iran problem. Saudi Arabia had its focus on internal issues, and counseled that it was not wise to raise the level of tension at this time.

15. (C) Regarding Bahrain's attitudes towards Iran, Shaikh Khalid expressed his country's increasing concern about Iran's activities and provocative stances. Iran is playing a "dirty role" in Iraq and the GOB is concerned that this role is being extended to Bahrain. The King has been vocal in private that "Bahrain does not want Iran to start up again" and hurt Bahrain's progress. "Iran always starts with Bahrain," the FM said, referring to aggressive Iranian stances in the past. "Bahrain is concerned about every plane that lands from Iran. We don't know what they have up their sleeves." In the context of recent statements by Iranian President Ahmedinajad, Shaikh Khalid said that during his meeting with the King in early December at the Organization of Islamic Conference meeting in Mecca, Ahmedinajad made the unsolicited offer that Iran could help "get rid of" foreigners in the Gulf. Shaikh Khalid underscored that this type of aggressive rhetoric concerned Bahrain greatly.

16. (C) Returning to GCC summit issues, Shaikh Khalid indicated that GCC leaders took a step back on the joint Peninsula Shield force, saying that they agreed that each member would keep its forces in its own country (rather than

deploy together), and that they would only come together for military exercises or if there was a crisis. On trade issues, he said they were still trying to grapple with bilateral FTAs signed with countries other than the U.S. While they had previously agreed that FTAs with the U.S. would be an exception, Qatar's FTA with Singapore was proving to be a challenge, and the UAE had initiated free trade talks with Australia and New Zealand. Finally, the GCC leaders agreed to postpone until 2007 the transition period to unify external GCC customs duties to five percent.

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